



Recreational Aviation Foundation
Preserving, Maintaining, and Creating Recreational airstrips
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WHY WE'RE PARTICIPATING:

The Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) wishes to insure the inclusion of aviation and backcountry airstrips as legitimate uses of National Forest Lands during the forthcoming development of new forest plans for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. It is our understanding that the new forest plans are "early adopter" efforts, using guidance from the New Planning Rule as announced by the U.S. Forest Service on Feb. 1, 2012.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

National Forests in numerous states, including Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Utah have had airstrips open for recreational use for many years, in some cases, since the 1920s and 1930s. **The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest has five existing and open airstrips on NFS lands.** Recently, Arizona and New Mexico have opened previously closed strips to be used for recreational purposes. In 2009, the Lewis and Clark National Forest opened a new airstrip called Russian Flat in the Little Belt Mountains in central Montana. This strip was constructed from donated funds and volunteer labor and equipment furnished by the pilot community. The pilot communities of all these states maintain the backcountry airstrips through the Forest Services' Volunteer program.

PLANNING RULE BACKGROUND:

The Recreational Aviation Foundation and other aviation organizations participated in all of the planning rule roundtables at the Washington DC level, as well as many Regional level sessions. As a direct result of this participation, aviation activities have been included in the new rule. Furthermore, planners working within the new rule have been directed to treat aviation resources as valuable recreational infrastructure during the development of forest plans. The specific wording in the Planning Rule is as follows:

"Sustainable recreation; including recreation settings, opportunities, and access; and scenic character. Recreation opportunities may include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air." PAGE 21266 FEDERAL REGISTER / VOL. 77, NO. 68 / MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2012 / RULES AND REGULATIONS, 219.10.b (1) (i), UNDER MULTIPLE USE

Further, the Preamble of the New Rule specifically states (middle column center of page):

"The rule recognizes and states in 219.10 and the definition in 219.19 that recreational opportunities include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and air. Examples include activities such as hiking, biking, hunting,, .geocaching, recreational aviation, hang gliding and many more."

Additionally, in the same column, last paragraph, bottom of page, the wording: *"Responsible officials must also consider placement and management of infrastructure, including recreational facilities. It is appropriate to refer to such facilities as infrastructure because recreational facilities are fixed capital installations that enhance recreational experiences. These facilities include: campgrounds, roads, trails, backcountry airstrips, and drinking water and waste water."* PAGE 21222 FEDERAL REGISTER / VOL. 77, NO. 68 / MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2012 / RULES AND REGULATIONS

The U.S. House of Representatives Appropriation Committee inserted language in their report to the full House of Representatives which stated in part:

*"**Back-country airstrips.**—The Committee notes that backcountry airstrips are an appropriate use of certain National Forest System (NFS) lands that can provide enhanced access for a variety of legitimate activities. The Committee encourages the Forest Service to support, through cooperative relationships with pilots and other interested user groups, the operation and maintenance of appropriate, existing backcountry airstrips as part of a balanced, safe, and efficient forest transportation system. The Committee urges the Forest*

Service to evaluate whether it is appropriate to establish additional backcountry airstrips on NFS lands as part of the land management planning process and consistent with applicable Federal Aviation Administration regulations (49 U.S.C. 1349). Further, the Committee directs the Forest Service to provide within 90 days upon enactment of this Act, an inventory of backcountry airstrips presently under Forest Service jurisdiction; a detailed description, including examples of the management, conservation, recreational, and public safety and security benefits and uses of existing airstrips; a description of any existing conflicts that presently hinder or may hinder operational use of any such airstrips in the future; a description of the primitive or wilderness values of the area in the vicinity of the airstrips, including environmental and habitat values that may be affected by the airstrip and its use; and an accounting of operation and maintenance costs incurred by the Forest Service in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 related to the present inventory of backcountry airstrips." (PAGE 92 112TH CONGRESS REPORT 1ST SESSION HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES REPORT 112-151 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATION BILL, 2012)

The House Interior Appropriations Bill abbreviated the House Appropriation Committee Report (stated above) with the following language:

"Back-country airstrips.—In place of the reporting requirements in the House Report for back-country airstrips, within one year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Forest Service is directed to provide the Committees with a general assessment of back-country airstrips on National Forest System lands with recommendations for improving their function as an important component of the forest transportation and recreation system." PAGE H9600 CONGRESSIONAL RECORD VOL. 157 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2011 NO. 193—BOOK II CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2055, CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

MANDATE:

Given the language in the New Planning Rule and the Preamble to the New Planning Rule, it is obvious the Forest Service intends that backcountry airstrips and recreational access via those airstrips be considered in future forest plans. Also, given the language in the Appropriations Committee report and the Interior Appropriations Bill, Congress expects (and is directing) the Forest Service to support, improve, and plan for backcountry airstrips within the NFS.

METHODOLOGY:

Forest managers should consider aircraft an alternate method of transportation for forest visitor's access to recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, hunting, and general enjoyment of the outdoors. Including recreational aviation in forest plans provides the authority and opportunity to address airstrips in subsequent travel plans. Here are some advantages of including backcountry airstrips in forest plans:

- They encompass a small footprint compared to roads and trails (+/- 2500 ft x75ft, usually located in a relatively flat natural meadow)
- They accrue low maintenance cost (often done by volunteers)
- They yield low impact on recreational dispersion (help move forest visitors from the front country to the backcountry without roads or trails)
- They retain low terrain and ecological impact (airplane campers are the equivalent of back packers because of limited load carrying capacity of small aircraft)
- They impart secondary internal trail head access (can disperse hikers to little used trails, aid trail congestion, and reduce trail erosion)

Aircraft and pilots constitute a vastly different classification of forest visitor. Here's why:

- Qualifying as a pilot involves extensive and lengthy training to published FAA standards
- Pilots must pass a strict FAA medical exam and undergo a flight review with an FAA check pilot every two years
- Pilots must maintain published FAA currency requirements for takeoffs and landings; these requirements must be accomplished every 90 days

The aircraft they fly are no less regulated, requiring (as a minimum) a costly annual inspection by an FAA licensed aircraft inspector. Deficiencies found during these inspections must be addressed by replacement or overhaul before the airplane can be returned to service. Non-compliance with FAA pilot and aircraft regulations can result in loss of license, monetary fines, and incarceration. No other transportation method has such stringent rules. Additionally, backcountry pilots are trained to *“FLY-IT-IN and FLY-IT-OUT”*, and are encouraged to practice proper outdoor recreational habits and etiquette.

OUR COMMITMENT:

Exclusion of airstrip assets in the forest planning process can be precipitated by a lack of understanding by land managers of the contributions airstrips can provide to the recreation spectrum of a forest. The Recreational Aviation Foundation stands ready to assist Forest managers at all levels in recognizing and planning for airstrips and recreational aviation opportunities.

Chief of Forest Service Memorandum



Forest
Service

Washington
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

File Code: 1900/2300/5100/5300/5400/7700

Date:

JUL 2 2009

Subject: Recreation Access Through Backcountry Airstrips

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, WTP Director, Deputy Chiefs
and WO Directors

Aviation has been part of our country's heritage, both as a mode of transportation and as a means of access to remote and scenic areas for a wide variety of purposes. Backcountry airstrips are an appropriate use of National Forest System (NFS) lands as they provide enhanced access for a variety of legitimate recreational activities and serve recreational pilots. Providing and maintaining backcountry airstrips enhance the spectrum of recreational uses of NFS lands. Providing backcountry airstrips serves recreationists who care deeply about use and enjoyment of NFS lands, both now and in the future. Recreation aircraft and backcountry airstrips can be an integral part of a balanced and efficient transportation system.

As Chief, I want line officers and resource planning staff to support use of recreational aircraft and backcountry airstrips on NFS lands where appropriate considering local resource conditions and as part of a balanced, safe, and efficient forest transportation system. It is our policy to develop aircraft landing facilities, including backcountry airstrips, on NFS lands consistent with the applicable land management plan and applicable Federal Aviation Administration regulations (49 U.S.C.1349).

Accordingly, pursuant to my authority at 36 CFR 212.2(c), I am prescribing that the annual program of work for the Forest Transportation System for each administrative unit (1) include an inventory of backcountry airstrips under Forest Service jurisdiction, regardless of prior ownership and (2) listing of these facilities on the Forest Transportation Atlas, where appropriate under the applicable land management plan and existing management direction and after assessment of potential risks to public safety and the requisite environmental analyses have been conducted.

Regulations at 36 CFR 212.1, Subpart A identify *airfields* as part of the Forest Transportation System. Aircraft are motor vehicles (36 CFR 212.1, Subpart A). However aircraft are exempt in regulations describing the designation of roads, trails, and areas at 36 CFR 212.5 (a) (1), Subpart B. The public use of the airfields listed in the Forest Transportation Atlas are to be managed similar to that of NFS roads and trails. Backcountry airstrips listed within the Forest Transportation System are open for general public, unless marked as closed.

Decisions to open backcountry airstrips to public use should be made after consultation with the local engineering, fire and aviation, recreation, ecosystem management, and other affected staffs. Ultimately local line officers are responsible for successful management of airstrips on NFS lands. Constrained availability of appropriated funds for operation and maintenance and potential risks to public safety and natural resources, including limited availability of assistance



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